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Notes on the Shambala and
Some Allied Languages of
East Africa



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NOTES ON THE SHAMBALA AND
SOME ALLIED LANGUAGES OF
EAST AFRICA

BY
A. WERNER

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NOTES ON THE SHAMBALA AND SOME ALLIED LANGUAGES OF EAST AFRICA

SWAHILI is, in some respects the Bantu tongue best known to Europeans; but less attention has been paid to the group of languages immediately behind the "Mrima" or strip of coast whose inhabitants speak a dialect differing but slightly from that of Zanzibar. These are, taking them from north to south, between the Tana and the Rufiji: Pokomo, Nyika, Shambala, Bondei, Zegula, Nguru, Kami, Zaramo. Behind these last two, as shown on our map, lie the districts where Khutu, Sagara and Gogo are spoken.

Father Torrend, in his provisional arrangement of the Bantu languages, places Shambala, Bondei, Zegula and Nguru in a "Shambala cluster" belonging to the eastern half of his "Main Group"—see the Introduction to his *Comparative Grammar of the South-African Bantu Languages* (p. xx). It is with these four languages that we are more particularly concerned, though we shall point out affinities with the surrounding groups as occasion arises.

The first vocabulary of Shambala was that sent home in MS. by Krapf (who called it "an additional dialect of Swahili") to Dr. Latham, and published by the latter in his *Comparative Philology*. This was before Krapf's first visit to Usambara (the Bondei form of the name seems to have taken root on our maps:—the people themselves call their country Shambalai), in 1848; he subsequently went again in 1852, but did not succeed in founding a mission there. The account of his journeys is to be found in the fifth and ninth chapters of his *Travels* (Vol. II of the original German

edition). The country was then ruled by the powerful chief Kimweri, who had his capital at Vuga, and of whom an interesting description is given.

Zigula (variously called Zigua, Zeguha and Zegula) is spoken in the district adjoining Usambara, but separated from it by the river Luvu (Ruvu) or Pangani. Some of the people speaking it (with a distinct dialect) live on the islands in that river, and are called Waluvu. The first attempt at collecting this language seems to have been made by Mr. J. T. Last, who included two vocabularies of it in his *Polyglotta Africana Orientalis* (pp. 49, 213—see also the introductory note on p. 8). Further work was contributed by the Revs. W. H. Kisbey and H. W. Woodward (now Archdeacon of Magila), after the Universities' Mission had established their station at Kologwe in 1891. The speakers of Zigula are separated from the coast by the narrow strip of the Mrima, extending south as far as Kilwa, where a dialect of Swahili is spoken. (See Steere's *Handbook of Swahili*, p. 213.)¹

Nguru, sometimes reckoned as a dialect of Zigula, but enumerated as a separate language in Dr. Cust's *Modern Languages of Africa* (II, 351), is spoken further inland, west of Uzigula. "Judging from language and customs of these two people, I think the Nguru are simply a branch of the Zeguha a little more advanced towards civilization, or who make themselves more prominent by their knowledge of coast customs." (Last, *Polyglotta Africana Orientalis*, p. 8.)

The Bondei occupy the space between the Luvu, the Uмба, Usambara, and the coast, as shown on the accompanying rough map. They are the people called Washenzi by Krapf, and described as subject to Kimweri. Before

¹ In Dr. Cust's *Modern Languages of Africa* (II, 351) we find *El Meg* given among the names of the Wazigula. Surely this is the Masai *Il Meek*, "savages," the name applied by them to the Bantu tribes. (See Mr. Hollis's book on *The Masai*, pp. xiii, 269, 272, 331.) It would scarcely be worth while to point out this, but for its suggesting that another name which has gained a certain currency may have a similar origin. On p. 352 of Dr. Cust's book, we find the statement that "Megi" appears to be a synonym of Sagara, and, later on, that Mr. Last, in answer to a question on the subject, "replied that Megi is the name of a sub-tribe of the Sagara, and that the Wa-Megi are called Wa-Kaguru by the Kwafi and Masai." It looks as if the words "Wa-Megi" and "Wa-Kaguru" in the last sentence had been accidentally reversed. I do not know if this has been pointed out before.

proceeding any further, it will be as well to enumerate briefly the literature available for these four languages. I shall be



exceedingly grateful to any one who will point out (and supply) any omissions in my list.

I. *Shambala*.

Bleek has a short note on Shambala prefixes (*Comp. Gr.*, pp. 190-191), founded on information supplied in a letter from Bishop Steere (1866).

Steere. Collections for a Handbook of the Shambala Language. Zanzibar, 1867.

This has been re-issued, considerably revised and improved, by Archdeacon Woodward (U.M.C.A., Msalabani, 1905).

J. T. Last, *Polyglotta Africana Orientalis*, 1885 (S.P.C.K.), contains a vocabulary (p. 41), and short note on the country and people (p. 7).

Wohlrab und Johansen, *Shambalalesefibel*, Berlin, 1892.

Two revised editions (1900 and 1904) of this Reading Book prepared by the German Evangelical Mission have since been published. The latest has adopted the spelling suggested by Prof. Meinhof: γ instead of r .

PUBLICATIONS OF THE GERMAN EVANGELICAL MISSION.

Mbuli za Mulungu, Gütersloh, 1894. Part II, 1896.

Ushimulezi wa Washambala, Gütersloh, 1894. Part II, 1898.

Ubilikizi wa nyemi ugondwayo ni Marko (St. Mark), Gütersloh, 1896.

Ubilikizi wa nyemi ugondwayo Yohana, Stuttgart, 1901.

Ubilikizi wa nyemi ugondwayo Matayo, Stuttgart, 1902.

Maimbo ya mviko (50 hymns).

A. Seidel, *Handbuch der Shambalaspache in Usambara, Deutsch-Ost-Afrika*. Mit Texten, einem Shambala-Deutschen, und einem Deutsch-Shambala Wörterbuch. Dresden and Leipzig, 1895.

This is reprinted, with addition and emendations (amounting to the re-casting of some parts) from the *Zeitschrift für Afrikanische Sprachen*, Jahrgang I, Heft. 1 and 2. Heft. 1 also contains a native tale (*Mvyele azayekina kungui*) which

does not appear in the *Handbuch*, and another (*Ngulue am-unila mwana mweaga*) is given in Jahrgang II, Heft. 2.

P. Erasmus Hörner, Grammatik der Shambalaspache, Mariannhill, Natal, 1899.

This is not in the catalogue of the British Museum Reading Room.

Catechism (*Mbuli za Kuuza Waana*), U.M.C.A., 1903.

St. Luke, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1903.

Carl Meinhof, Linguistische Studien in Ostafrika. II, Shambala.—In the Transactions of the Berlin Oriental Seminary for 1904. (Abtheilung III, Afrikanische Studien). Also reprinted separately.

Besides this we may expect an important study of the grammar from Pastor Roehl, of Bumbuli.

II. Bondei.

Woodward, H. W., Rev., Collections for a Handbook of the Bondéi Language (S.P.C.K.), 1882.

Last, *Polyglotta Africana Orientalis*, Vocabulary (p. 37).

Dale, Rev. G., Bondei Exercises, Magila (=Msalabani), 1894.

Woodward (Ven. Archdeacon), Stories in the Bondei Language, 1894.

(One of these is reprinted, with a German translation, by Herr Seidel, in *Zeitschrift für Afrikanische Sprachen*, I, iii, 237.)

III. Zigula.

Ewald published a Grammatical Note of this language (no doubt from materials furnished by Krapf) in the *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, so long ago as 1846. A Vocabulary is given in the unabridged edition of Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878).

Last, Two Vocabularies in *Polygl. Afr. Or.* (pp. 49, 213).

Kisbey, Rev. W. H., Zigua Exercises (S.P.C.K.).

Woodward (Ven. Archdeacon), Collections for a Handbook of the Zigula Language (U.M.C.A.), Msalabani, 1902. Also Catechism (1902).

IV. Nguru.

I can find no materials for this language except the Vocabulary in Mr. Last's *Polyglotta* (p. 45). As, however, this author reckons it as a dialect of Zigula, it may perhaps be considered as virtually identical with the latter.

Any suggestions for completing this tentative bibliography will be heartily welcomed.

I. *Phonetics.*

Some of the most interesting points are as follow:—

H for P. These languages, in common with all the surrounding ones, except Kamba and Swahili, suffer from what Sir H. H. Johnston has called "the Ha-disease," which, according to him, "spreads westward down the west coast of Tanganyika, and right across to the Upper Congo."¹ The sound *p* does not, properly speaking, exist: its place is taken by *h*, "pronounced (in Shambala) with a deep sighing sound necessitating a slight pause before it." Thus the locative particle *pa* becomes *ha*, the Swahili *pita*, "to pass, go," becomes *hita*, *pima*, "to measure," *hima*, and so on. *P* is, however, restored, when preceded by *m*. "The nasals *n* and *m* have in many cases the beneficial effect of retaining consonants which, according to the general laws, should have been weakened or dropped altogether."² Thus we find *mpanga*, "a cave," *mpeho*, "wind" (Sw. *pepo*, but some other languages, *mpepo*), *mpula*, "nose." But we find also *mhini*, "a handle," *mhunga*, "rice," &c. The explanation is, no doubt, to be found in the occurrence of the forms *muhini*, *muhunga*,—*cf.* also *muhingo*, "ebony" (= *mpingo*). In fact Prof. Meinhof points out that the *u* is apt to be swallowed in quick speaking, or at least, is not distinct to unaccustomed ears. This principle is somewhat obscured in the vocabularies by the frequent occurrence of borrowed Swahili words, which are especially common in Bondei—indeed, it appeared at one time as if the present generation of Wa-Bondei were entirely disusing their own language in favour of Swahili. Probably it was the presence of these

¹ *Uganda Protectorate*, p. 895.

² *Ibid.*, p. 895.

words which led Bishop Steere and Archdeacon Woodward to insert *p* in their alphabets without further remark than "as in English."

Pokomo, and Nyika, by the bye, while sharing the dislike to *p* standing alone, appear to substitute for it, not *h* but *bf* and *v* (*cf.* *w* similarly used in Luganda), and to keep *h* for replacing *t*. "These two languages, though differing considerably from each other, have this remarkable feature in common that they have generally the consonant *h* where the main group of the Bantu languages has a *t*. However, this letter re-appears regularly under the influence of *n* expressed or dropped." (Torrend, p. 21, § 93.)

L between two vowels. One of the most noticeable features in Swahili is the consistent dropping of intervocalic *l*:—*paa*, *Wa Shambaa*, *fungua*, *lia*, &c., &c. Shambala seems to indicate an intermediate stage of this process. Prof. Meinhof says, "*l* often has a palatal pronunciation, so that it seems to the beginner to disappear altogether between two vowels, or is heard as *y*. . . . Sometimes it does in fact drop out or is replaced by the palatal fricative *y*, as *hayila* = *halila*, relative form of the verb *hala*; *taila* = *talila*, from *tala*." Individual pronunciation varies greatly in this, as well as in the subtler distinction between palatal and alveolar *l*, in which Prof. Meinhof has "auf consequente Schreibung verzichten müssen."

γ = *gh* = *ř*. The guttural γ (written *gh* in the U.M.C.A. publications, and said by Archdeacon Woodward to sound "something like the Arabic ξ ghain") was heard by the earlier German missionaries, either as "cerebral *r*" (*Zäpfchen-r*)—in which case they wrote it *ř*,—or as ordinary hard *g*. Pastor Meinhof attributes this mistake to the fact that most of them were North Germans "who, as is well known, are not always careful in distinguishing γ and *g*." The gamma is now used for this sound in all texts printed by the German Mission. It is interesting to find that Prof. Meinhof had inferred from his investigations of Bantu phonetic laws that Shambala *ought* to have this sound, before his observations on the spot convinced him that such was actually the case. It was the first language in his experi-

ence in which γ was found corresponding to a hypothetical Ur-Bantu γ . This primitive sound in other cases becomes g , y , k , j , or drops altogether.

SH and CH. Shambala regularly has *sh*, where Bondei and Zigula have *s*, and Swahili, *ch*. Ex.

Shambala	Bondei and Zigula	Swahili	
sheka	seka	cheka	= to laugh
shenga	senga	chenga	= to cut
shagula	sagula	chagua	= to choose
shakala	sakala	chakaa	= grow old
sheshe	sese	cheche	= a spark
shembe	sembe = cleaned rice	chemba	= grain

It should be added that Shambala *sh* is not quite an ordinary English *sh* in "ship," but is pronounced with the teeth closed. It would be well to note if this is the case with the sound in other Bantu languages.

This brings us to the consideration of the sound *ch*, properly spelt *c*. Archdeacon Woodward says (*Shambala Handbook*, p. 2):—

"*Ch* as in cherry. *Ch* according to Pastor Meinhof represents two sounds in Shambala; at present I have not been able to distinguish them, nor do our Shambala boys seem to recognize a difference. Nevertheless no doubt the difference exists."

If I have rightly understood Prof. Meinhof's notes on the subject, the two sounds in question are those represented in Nyanja by *ty* and *c* (*ch*) respectively. A moderately sensitive ear will easily distinguish, in that language, *tyoka*, "to be broken," from *choka*, "to go away." The *ty* sound seems to be the only one existing in Luganda. The Rev. W. A. Crabtree says, "'Ch' in English is formed with the point of the tongue, but 'c' in Luganda is formed with the blade of the tongue; the tongue is not turned up in the least, but instead a little down, in very nearly the same position as in forming the letter 'y'; in fact, 'c' may be described as a slightly lipsped 'ch.'"

This sound is written by Prof. Meinhof *tj*. He finds it in the words *chala*, "finger," *kucha*, "to dawn," *cha*, possessive particle of the *ki*-class. Here the *ch* (*ty*) corresponds to

a Swahili *ch*, which, according to Prof. Meinhof ought also to be written *ty* (*tj*)—*tyungu* for *cungu*, “a cooking-pot,” and comes from an original *ky*. The sound usually written *c* or *ch* comes from a primitive *k*, as in Swahili *cungu*, “bitter,” *ceka*, “to laugh,” *coma*, “to light a fire.” This is the sound which corresponds to Shambala *sh*: Professor Meinhof proposes to write it *tš*. He discovered a third sound in Swahili, that heard in *chini*, *chui*, *changa*, “immature” (when agreeing with nouns of the *ki*-class: the stem is *canga*). This, as far as I can make out, is *c* followed by an aspirate (as when we pronounce “*witch-hazel*” without leaving an interval between the two words), and if so, should be written *ch*. The Rev. W. E. Taylor (*African Aphorisms*, p. xii) speaks of an “aspirated or explosive ‘ch.’” It, too, seems to correspond to Shambala *sh* (*shui*, “a leopard”—Bondei *sui*). It may not be out of place to quote a remark on *ch* from Steere’s *Handbook of the Swahili Language* (p. 259):—

“It would perhaps be an improvement to write all *ch*’s which represent *ki* by a simple *c*, which has been used for this sound in Sechuana, and to write all *ch*’s which represent *t* by *ty*, which has been used for this sound in writing Zulu. [Incorrectly so—the sound is now written *tsh*.¹] But both are here represented by *ch*, because at least in the infancy of our studies it is puzzling to have two signs for one sound, and neither way of writing might be quite satisfactory in all cases.”

This was written in (or before) 1870 and the study of Swahili is no longer in its infancy. Besides, when it is recognized that we are dealing, not with one sound, but two, it is at least as puzzling to represent two by one as one by two.

Z=J. Another sound-shifting common to Shambala, Bondei and Zigula is *z* for Swahili *j*, as *zenga*=*jenga*, *zumbe*=*jumbe*.

A+U=O. “In Shambala as in many other dialects *a* when followed by *u* has a tendency to coalesce with it, or to

¹ The question of this sound and its correspondences in Zulu needs a separate study.

take the sound of *o*." (Shambala *Handbook*, p. 2.) We find this in Zulu, where *na umuntu* becomes *nomuntu*; *wa umuti*, *womuti*. It also seems to be the case in Nyanja, in forms like *wo-yera*, *cho-limba*, &c.; *wo* standing for *wa ku* with the *k* dropped out. But Nyanja elsewhere does not mind keeping the vowels separate: *wa ufulu*, *munda wa atate*, *mibvi ya uta*. *U* is also frequently dropped out, as in *mdzi* for *mudzi*, *m'nyumba'mo*, for *mu nyumba umo*. Luganda can scarcely be said to have the contraction $a + o = u$; as the initial *u* of the first class has everywhere been changed to *o*: in *omwana womukazi* we have not *wa umukazi*, but *w'omukazi*. The other point, the actual substitution of *o* for *a*, as when "*kaula* is sometimes pronounced *koula*," I do not remember to have met with elsewhere; but it is common to Shambala and Zigula.

The change of *mu* to *ñw* before a vowel (*ñwana*, which is also the Ronga form) is interesting; it looks as if Shambala, like Zulu,¹ avoided the combination of *w* with a mute labial. But we find *bwia*, "to arrive at."

TONE. This, meaning the pitch or inflection by which words, otherwise identical in sound are distinguished from each other, is now found to exist in a great number of the Bantu languages. I had myself come to the conclusion, in 1893, that the difference between the Nyanja words *mtengo*, "tree," and *mtengo*, "price," must be one of pitch; and the Rev. D. C. Scott (Cyclopædic Dictionary of the *Mang'anja Language*, p. 394) says that *mtengo* = "price" is "pronounced with a lower tone." The question of tones in the Bantu languages has been examined by Herr Endemann (*Mittheilungen des Seminars für orientalische Sprachen*, 1901, Dritte Abtheilung, Afrikanische Studien, p. 37), and, more recently, by Prof. Meinhof. As I hope to devote a separate paper to this subject, I shall not dwell upon it fully here, merely remarking that in Shambala a large number of apparently similar words are only to be discriminated by this means. Archdeacon Woodward says, "We had noticed something

¹ Thus we have *unyezi* instead of *umwezi*, *utshane* instead of *ubwane*, *utshwala* instead of *ubwala* (Cwana *boyala*) and numerous (and, till the principle is known, puzzling) letter-changes in diminutives, locatives, and passives.

of the kind here in Bondei years ago, but had not taken much note of it until Mr. Meinhof's visit." The careful inquiries then instituted had interesting results.

II. Grammar. A few points may be briefly dealt with.

The *lu* and *bu* classes have fared somewhat differently in Shambala and Bondei. Archdeacon Woodward makes them into one in the former language—I cannot help thinking erroneously, as they have preserved a clear distinction. *Lu* takes *ma* in the plural: *lushalu*, "a bead," pl. *mashalu*. Abstract and collective nouns in *u* (clearly contracted from *ubu*, though here, as elsewhere, there may be some *lu* nouns among them) have no plural: *ufa*, "inheritance" (Zulu *i-fa*), *ushu*, "greediness." In Bondei the *lu* class keeps the trace of its original plural in *izin*, attenuated, as in Swahili, into *ny*, with the concords *zi* and *za* (though the singular prefix is not usually, as in Swahili, contracted to *u*):—*luayo*, "a footstep" (cf. Zulu *u(lu)nyawo*, "a foot")—pl. *nyayo*. Abstract nouns are considered as belonging to this class, where we see, here and there (in *uilo*, "a song," *uwongo*, "brain," &c.), signs of a transition to the state of things in which *ubu* and *ulu* are confounded in a common contraction into *u*.

The Diminutive class is curious. Diminutives in *ka* are common enough, but here they make their plural in *wa* or sometimes *vi*. There is also a way of expressing "a small quantity" of collectives only used in the plural—or the singular, as the case may be—which is new to us. "A little water" is *wazazi* (from *mazi*), "a little milk," *wazele* (from *mele*), "a little honey," *wazoki* (from *woki*). Luganda *otudzi*, "a drop of water," seems to suggest a more obvious use of the diminutive.

In Zigula, we find that "the following pronominal particles are frequently used as definite articles:—*i*, *vi*, *di*, *zi*, *a*."

"*Akawkela ulanga kwe i miti*, he climbed up the tree.
Akasika i futi, he presented the gun."

This is more like a real article than anything we have hitherto met with in any Bantu language; for the initial vowel

does not seem to us (as alleged by some) to fulfil any of the functions of an article, except by being dropped in the vocative.

The Locative case is in Shambala formed by suffixing *i*: *nyumbai*=in the house; *Shambalai*=in Usambara. In Bondei we have either *-i* or (as in Swahili) *-ni*. Zigula, apparently, does not use the suffix, only the prepositions *ha-* (*he, ho*), *ku-* (*kwe, ko*) and *mu-* (*mwe, mo*).

The Perfect in *-ile* is in use to a limited extent in Shambala and Zigula, not in Bondei. This tense is one of the points in Bantu grammar which need a thorough comparative examination.

On p. 65, Archdeacon Woodward gives a list of those curious onomatopoeic words called "substantives" by Father Torrend, "adverbs" by Dr. Hetherwick, "*adverbes descriptifs*" by M. Junod, and "particles" (see *First Steps in Zulu*, p. 128) by the late Bishop Colenso, who thought that they were often "fragments of verbs." These words offer an interesting field for speculation. It almost seems as if they might be—not fragments of verbs, but primary elements of speech, out of which verbs and other words are built up. However, it would be wrong to construct a hypothesis without a much more complete and thorough study of the evidence than has hitherto been made. We may note, however, that no fewer than nine of the "onomatopoeic substantives" given by Archdeacon Woodward begin with *p*, the sound which Shambala most persistently rejects. This class of words is surely one of the least likely to be borrowed from other languages; and, moreover, we cannot find a single one of the nine in Swahili. The only explanation I can suggest (a merely tentative one) is that these words have been wrongly written down, and really begin with *m*. Yet if "*m* has a semivowel sound, as though preceded by a suppressed *u*"—or, in other words, is stressed and as it were made into a separate syllable, as in Swahili (*m̄-tu*), it could hardly be missed by the hearer in such a case.

In connection with these words, we may mention the idiomatic use of the verb *ti*, "to say," whose association with them is so familiar to us in many Bantu languages, but which

seems to have been quite lost in Swahili—perhaps because there was a wealth of Arabic synonyms to make handy substitutes for its compounds. We see it already going out of use before we reach Zanzibar. “*Kuti*, to say, speak to, seems to be used in these parts only in Kishambala. In languages South of the Zambezi, it is often met with. It is used only in the present and past tenses, and always with an objective prefix” (this last point we have not encountered elsewhere). “*Nakuti*, I say to you. *Nawati*, I said to them.”

A. WERNER.

NOTE.

It would be well if Bantu scholars resident in Africa would give us their views with regard to the separation of words. A Conference of American Missionaries in Natal has just formulated a set of orthographical rules for the Zulu language, some of which appear to be sound enough, while others, it seems to me, call for an energetic protest. “The pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, and auxiliaries to the verb should be written separately, as *ngi*, *u*, *ba*, *sa*, *nga*, *de*, *ze*, *hle*, *simze*, *zinge*, *amandhla*, *kade*, &c., *e.g.* *ngi ya ba tanda abantu*.” In this rule, two classes of words are confounded—*simze*, *zinge*, &c., are independent words—*ngi*, *u*, *ba*, are *not*: they cannot stand alone. Archdeacon Woodward certainly disapproves of this system; so, I gather, do Prof. Meinhof, and (to a certain extent), Father Torrend, who writes *wazifaka*, *uyazazi*, though he separates the initial vowel of nouns. Of course this is a distinct matter from hyphening the prefixes and particles for the benefit of European learners, as I always do in the early stages.

A. W.

NOTICES

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